

Return to the Realm

HOW DO YOU RELAX AFTER A hard day on the job? Invite friends over for dinner? Stop by the pub for a pint? Hack a few ogres to pieces? Did I mention that your job was crafting armor for battle-hungry warriors? For a



growing group of online gamers, an evening's relaxation means all of these things.

Welcome to *The Realm*, an online community of 20,000. Within its 5,000 rooms and locations, players can quest for gold and treasure, forge armor and weaponry, sell their skills as powerful enchanters, fight evil monsters, or visit friends in their favorite pub.

The Realm has proven to be so intriguing that many players are now logging in for a second year of play! Renewal rates stand at an impressive 42%. Many of *The Realm's* regulars—from poets and advisors to jokers and thieves—have become recognizable features of the game's environment.

We chatted with several of these returning players. Each of them gave a different reason for renewing their membership, but a recurring theme was the lack of monthly fees (unlike other online RPGs, *The Realm* costs only \$49.95 for a year's worth of play). These veteran players help to give the game a sense of history and permanence. And to keep the forest clear of ogres. (www.realmserver.com)